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STATINTL

What Now, Mr. President?

The announced seven-day ceasefire to celebrate the lunar new year in war-torn Viet Nam is just about at an end. Except for some isolated incidents, it has been essentially a peaceful period. Could it be the lull before the big storm?

The Buddhists also observe the holiday but there were indications that they plan to resume anti-government activity as soon as the celebration ends.

Extremist youth groups in central Viet Nam want Brig. Gen. Nguyen Chanh Thi, the military governor of central Viet Nam, to become premier. They have also said they want U.S. Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor thrown out of the country.

Here at home pressure continues to grow for a negotiated settlement or neutralization of the Viet Nam problem. Something called "enlightened isolationism" is also getting attention.

Last week we witnessed the eighth change of government since the murder of Diem; it would be more accurate to say that the eight changes have produced no government. As usual, the U.S., which is underwriting the South Vietnamese defense as Communist guerrilla warfare, was caught flat-footed. General Taylor was away on a visit to Laos and Thailand.

After a briefing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last Tues-

day by CIA Director John McCone, Chairman J. W. Fulbright said, "I don't see any sign of another coup." At that moment the latest coup was underway.

The President followed up the coup by dispatching McGeorge Bundy, his national security affairs advisor, to South Viet Nam to confer with our people there and the South Vietnamese. He has received more than one snub while on his flying visit and his scheduled report to Mr. Johnson this weekend should make interesting reading.

To all that has gone before we must add a new ingredient. Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin, visiting North Viet Nam, has offered an air defense program that could 'checkmate' long-range U.S. strategy based on the threat of aerial attacks on North Viet Nam. The Russian is reported to have promised the North Vietnamese new MIG jet fighters and anti-aircraft guns capable of downing U-2s.

The Kosygin move could force drastic changes in American military strategy in Southeast Asia. And the Chinese Communists do not have the air power to match the Russian offer.

What do we do, now, Mr. President? You seem confident that the ninth coup won't invite us to leave. Will we continue our adventures like Voltaire's fool, Candide, who experienced everything and learned nothing?